

# THETFORD RIVER NETWORK

## A report exploring the issues and opportunities along Thetford's River Network

January 2021

### Introduction

Thetford is blessed to have an abundance of environmental assets. On the Western side of Thetford is of course Thetford Forest and to the Southeast there is the Nunnery Lakes Nature Reserve. The Town Council is the custodian of several acres of Common land which is used for a variety of purposes and rich in flora and fauna. Thetford also lies on the River Little Ouse and River Thet and although it is not confirmed, Thetford's name likely comes from the settlement's proximity to the river.

Recent surveys have confirmed that Thetford's residents are very passionate about the river network, recognising its environmental significance but also the role it plays in terms of leisure and exercise with the river routes providing popular walking and running routes and the river itself providing opportunities for canoeing, kayaking, paddle boarding and for the extreme - swimming!

This report seeks to document the many issues and opportunities for improvement along the river corridor, focusing on the River Thet as it enters Thetford from the boundary with Kilverstone and Brettenham Parish, through Cloverfield and into the Town Centre where it joins with the Little Ouse River and flows out past the Abbey Estate and on towards Brandon.

### 1) Cloverfields River Pathway

There is poor access from Green Lane to the Thetford Garden Centre site. The river pathway route is quite overgrown and there are a number of fallen trees in the river impeding the river flow and in some cases a hindrance on the pathway itself. A number of sections of the pathway are very muddy and wet and need to be enhanced to allow for better access. The riverside path does not continue to Hurth Way effectively cutting people off from continuing along the river unless they go up into Primrose Close and back down Rosecroft Way and navigate their way along a busy road where there is no formal path. There is currently no crossing point on this busy road either at the river end of Hurth Way and no crossing point connecting this section to Arlington Way and the continuing river pathway.

**Action:**

- 1a. Explore new pathway from Tesco to Garden Centre
- 1b. Raise / reconstruct pathway in relevant sections along the river route
- 1c. Remove fallen trees from river and along pathways
- 1d. Explore access opportunities near Hurth Way and Arlington Way

### 2. Gentle Meadow

The wooden footbridges have become worn over time and need replacing. The breach in the riverbank has had a temporary repair. A more permanent fish pass has been proposed with match funding sought from the Environment Agency and Thetford Town Council. The hardcore path along the river does not continue past the area opposite Ford Place. The area is environmentally rich but there are no interpretation panels or guidance for visitors on this.

- Action:**
- 2a. Replace damaged footbridges
  - 2b. Install fish-pass
  - 2c. New pathway to be constructed along river route opposite Ford Place
  - 2d. Install new interpretation panels and way-markers

### **3. Nun's Bridges**

The view of the river is blocked from the pathway due to epicormic growth on trees along the route. There are no benches facing the river along this stretch of pathway. Cars parking on the Mill Lane side of the river have worn away the grass leaving muddy patches. Two large fallen trees have been left and look unsightly. The entrance to Nuns Bridges from Ford Street is unsightly with a build-up of fallen leaves and rubbish. The wall to Carford House has been damaged in a number of places and looks very unsightly.

- Action:**
- 3a. Cut back epicormic growth along the pathway
  - 3b. New benches to be installed along route – suggested near to existing bins
  - 3c. Remove fallen trees
  - 3d. Area to be cleaned of leaves and rubbish
  - 3e. Owner of Carford House to be encouraged to repair wall

### **4. Spring Walk**

At the Mill Lane end of Bridges Walk the land next to the betting shop has a crumbling low brick wall on the roadside and regularly becomes overgrown. The betting shop wall is covered in graffiti. The path surface is in need of improvement with some sections difficult for pedestrians to utilise. The Spring Walk noticeboard on the route is a good feature but is damaged with the roundel at the top missing. Other such boards around the town are also not maintained.

- Action:**
- 4a. The overgrown area should be cut back
  - 4b. The graffiti on the wall should be overpainted green
  - 4c. Raise pathway in relevant sections with pipes to allow water flow
  - 4d. Repair the Spring Walk noticeboards and others that are damaged

### **5. Butten Island**

The paths through Butten Island are susceptible to flooding in certain places. There is a lack of seating on the island. There are no interpretation panels explaining the history of Duleep Singh.

- Action:**
- 5a. Relevant pathways to be raised with pipes underneath
  - 5b. Additional seating to be installed and possibly pergolas with planting
  - 5c. New interpretation panels to be installed

### **6. School Lane Car Park / Coffee Mill**

The bridge by the Coffee Mill has a number of cobbles removed and the holes have been filled with tarmac which does not look very attractive. The steps by the kiosk and a section of the bank are in need of maintenance – there are a number of bushes blocking views of the river. The old Argos shutters are covered in graffiti making the area look run down.

- Action:**
- 6a. Cobbles to be replaced
  - 6b. The launch steps and riverbank are repaired
  - 6c. Bushes are trimmed / removed
  - 6d. Graffiti to be removed

### **7. Town Centre / Riverside / Town Bridge**

There are a large amount of weeds coming from the walls of the river bank. Not only does this make the area look untidy but over time it will cause damage to the masonry. It is believed that wiring exists which would allow for the reinstatement of heritage themed lights on the Town Bridge. There exist two benches just past the Town Bridge but they are in a poor state of repair and need to be repainted black as per conservation protocol. The benches are believed to be owned by Thetford Town Council. The Steel River Blues boat is becoming an eyesore, trapping weeds and rubbish at the river level and not maintained above. The planters near to the former Argos store are not maintained and full of weeds. The benches along this stretch of river need to be repainted and there are no trees along this route where once there was. There is a surplus metal pole just passed the Three Legged Bridge where once a CCTV was.

- Action:**
- 7a. Weeds growing from the brickwork along the river should be removed.
  - 7b. New heritage themed lights to be installed on the Town Bridge
  - 7c. Benches to be repainted black
  - 7d. Begin work to discuss future of Steel River Blues and consider options
  - 7e. Refurbish benches in this area and install replacement trees
  - 7f. Remove surplus metal pole near Three Legged Bridge

### **8. Blaydon Bridge / Haling Path**

Trees and bushes along both sides of the river are overgrown which block views of the river. Many walkers like to stop and take a rest overlooking the river and some elderly walkers find this length of river too long without a rest and there are few opportunities to sit down. The Blaydon Bridge plaque is subject to graffiti, as is the underpass nearest to Wilko and the Brandon Road underpass which is visible from Blaydon Bridge. The motorcycle inhibitors are particularly unsightly and subject to considerable amount of rust. They are subject to graffiti and general wear and tear, with exposed sharp edges presenting a health and safety issue.

- Action:**
- 8a. Trees & bushes along the river to be pruned back where necessary
  - 8b. Seats to be replaced where concrete plinths already exist
  - 8c. Graffiti needs removing from underpass sections
  - 8d. Graffiti needs removing from Blaydon Bridge plaque
  - 8e. Rusty motorcycle inhibitors need removing

### **9. Blaydon Bridge / Abbey Water Meadows**

The transition from tarmac to riverside mud path on the Abbey Water Meadows side of the river is not only uneven but also a trip hazard. It is difficult to use for wheelchair / buggy users and also those participating in Parkrun as this forms part of their route. Norfolk County Council has costed up a new Breedon Gravel pathway for this section which runs from the Blaydon Bridge down to the existing pathway closer to the Priory. The cost of this is in the region of £18,000. In December 2020, Thetford Town Council agreed to submit this project to the Norfolk County Council Parish Partnership scheme. If successful, Norfolk County Council would fund 50% of the cost of the scheme with the other half being met by Thetford Town Council.

- Action:**
- 9a. Construct new pathway using Breedon Gravel as part of Parish Partnership scheme, but should the funding not be successful, identify other funding sources

### **10. Water Meadows / Minstergate Link**

The area nearest the river adjoining the electricity substation by the inner relief road is overgrown and used for anti-social behaviour. There is poor access for pedestrians from Minstergate car park with the underpass being dirty and uninviting to potential visitors to the Priory. A new cast iron feature could be installed above the entrance to the underpass to link it

with the historical feature on the other side. The electricity substation at the entrance to the Water Meadows is unsightly and could be improved by simply painting the fencing green.

- 10a. Paint fencing around substation green
- 10b. Install new cast iron covering above underpass entrance
- 10c. Clean underpass and improve lighting
- 10d. Cut back overgrown bushes nearest to river where ASB an issue

### **11. Canterbury Way 'Beach' Area**

The Canterbury Way road bridge has a large amount of graffiti on both sides of the river. The A11 bypass also has graffiti. The beach area near the Canterbury Way road bridge needs repair and the rubbish in the river needs removing. The plastic mesh was intended to foster a green bank but is now an eyesore and does not allow easy canoe portage. The small brick building nearest to the weir is covered in graffiti.

- 11a. Remove graffiti from all bridges and small building near to the weir
- 11a. Paint small brick building green to blend in with surroundings
- 11c. Remove black plastic mesh and install a concrete slope with battens to assist canoe portage





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1. Cloverfield River Pathway
2. Gentle Meadow
3. Nun's Bridges
4. Spring Walk
5. Butten Island
6. School Lane Car Park
7. Town Centre / Riverside / Town Bridge
8. Blaydon Bridge / Haling Path
9. Blaydon Bridge / Abbey Water Meadows
10. Water Weadows / Minstergate Link
11. Canterbury Way Beach Area